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TAGS: [AF](#) [ASEC](#) [KCRM](#) [KNNP](#) [PARM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [BY](#) [XA](#) [ZF](#)
SUBJECT: GUIDANCE ON RESPONDING TO REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE
IN IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL NUCLEAR MATERIAL

REF: A. BUJUMBURA 000302 02-JULY-2009
[1](#)B. IIR 6 916 0038 09 02-JULY-2009
[1](#)C. IIR 6 916 0039 09 04-JULY 2009
[1](#)D. KAMPALA 000086 10-JAN-2003
[1](#)E. IIR 4 201 0118 05 09-OCT-2004
[1](#)F. STATE 030541 31-MAR-2009
[1](#)G. KESSLER-DIAMOND E-MAIL DATED 9-JUL-2009

Classified By: ISN DAS Eliot Kang

- [1](#)1. (U) This is an action request for Embassy Bujumbura.
Please see paragraph 6.
- [1](#)2. (S//NF) SUMMARY: Regarding the July 2 report of an illicit trafficking incident in the Republic of Burundi (ROB), Post has asked Washington for assistance in identifying potential nuclear material in a canister, currently in storage at the Burundian Intelligence Service headquarters. See response and action request below. END SUMMARY.
- [1](#)3. (S//NF) BACKGROUND: Per REF A and B, on 2 July 2009, Post alerted Washington that it had received a report indicating a potential incident of illicit trafficking in nuclear and/or radiological material. The Defense Attache (DATT) generated a report after meeting with ROB intelligence officials, who asked for United States' assistance in identifying what was alleged to be a canister of uranium. Post initially relayed this information to the Political Military Action Team (PMAT) by telephone at 1035Z, and additional information was transmitted by email at 1151Z. The alleged uranium canister viewed by the DATT was described as a metal container two feet long and six inches in diameter with accompanying documents that reference "U-A238." The two photocopied documents appear to be test results verifying the radioactive nature of the material. The documents purport to be from Uganda and Zaire while the ROB claims it acquired the canister from a local citizen who reportedly obtained it from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The canister is currently in storage at the Burundian Intelligence Service headquarters in Kigobe, Bujumbura.
- [1](#)4. (S//NF) ASSESSMENT: Similar "wicker basket" cases have occurred frequently for several years, often involving Congolese sources or suppliers and the DRC as the origin and usually with similar device characteristics and documents. Apparently another "wicker basket" case occurred in Bujumbura in 2007 (Bujumbura 000515, 17-Jul-2007). With respect to Refs A and C, we note that some previous documents include the same names of the "experts." In Ref D, documentation similar to that in Ref A and C accompanied a claim of a container in

a wicker basket in Kampala in 2003. The report names Tshika Mutombo as an expert in this case, making it likely that the documentation accompanying the current container is an iteration of the documentation in the Kampala case. Ref E report is from a walk-in in Nairobi in 2004 who had documentation originating from Zaire regarding uranium available for sale that includes the name of another expert, Mwamba Kalala, also named in Ref A and C documents. As in previous "wicker basket" cases, the accompanying documents contain numerous technical inaccuracies and mistakes that support a current assessment that the container is likely not of concern and could be a scam.

¶5. (S//NF) ASSESSMENT (CONT'D) Ref G contains Nuclear Assessment Program (NAP) Sales Bulletins 1505, 1452, 1372, and 1348 which provide valuable detailed analysis of trends observed in past "wicker basket" uranium cases. Additional information about similarities to previous cases can be found in intelligence reporting dating back several years.

¶6. (S//NF) ACTION REQUEST: Post is requested to coordinate with the country team and then inform Washington of all resources available that may be helpful in identifying the material inside the canister, including possibly transferring equipment from other posts in the region. Washington believes this canister is likely not a threat but is interested in determining what material may be inside and removing it from circulation because such cases drain law-enforcement resources and increase demand for such materials. Post is also requested to provide a coordinated response from the country team to the questions posed in paragraph 6 in order to reduce any possible duplicate reporting. Washington greatly appreciates Post's immediate notification of the seizure.

¶7. (S//REL TO ROB) FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

--(SBU) Washington is looking into the possibility of an RSO in a neighboring country providing a radiation detection pager and radiation identifier to the Defense Attach in Bujumbura; DIA would provide procedures for use of the equipment. In the event that Post is unable to locate a radiation detector in USG custody in Bujumbura, are other avenues available to obtain this equipment, such as requesting assistance from allied embassies?

--(S//REL TO ROB) Could Burundian authorities confirm the veracity of reports of health hazards caused by the material?

--(S//REL TO ROB) Is it possible to identify the "local citizen" who provided the material to the host government? A name could provide some insight on if/how this case could be related to previous cases that involved similar containers and documents.

--(S//REL TO ROB) Does the host government plan to store or dispose of the container?

--(S//REL TO ROB) How long has the host government been in possession of the container?

--(S//REL TO ROB) Who in the DRC provided the material to the businessman (seller)?

--(S//REL TO ROB) Who provided the documents to the businessman?

--(S//REL TO ROB) What extremists associations do the businessman or his associates have?

--(S//REL TO ROB) Who has the businessman tried to sell the materials to?

¶8. (SBU) REPORTING DEADLINE: Post is requested to provide a coordinated response via front-channel cable no later than July 13, 2009.

CLINTON